

a vend space comprising a portion of the space in said vending machine through which said selected product will automatically fall into a bin portion for retrieval by the consumer; and

an optical vend-sensing system configured to sense when said selected product passes through said vend space, said optical vend-sensing system including,

an emitter mechanism configured to generate electromagnetic radiation that substantially spans said vend space, and

a detector mechanism configured to receive said electromagnetic radiation generated by said emitter mechanism and to detect changes in said electromagnetic radiation caused by said selected product passing through said vend space.

41. 98. (Amended) A vending machine, comprising:

a transparent front;

a plurality of dispensing mechanisms, each configured to respectively dispense a product selected by a consumer, at least one of the dispensing mechanisms configured to dispense a product having at least one of a different size and a different shape as compared to a product dispensed by another of the dispensing mechanisms;

a vend space comprising a portion of the space in said vending machine through which said selected product will automatically fall into a bin portion for retrieval by the consumer;

an optical vend-sensing system configured to sense when said selected product passes through said vend space regardless of the size, shape and from which dispensing mechanism the selected product was dispensed; and

a control mechanism configured to control said dispensing as a function of when said optical vend-sensing system senses said product passing through said vend space.

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99. (Amended) The vending machine of claim 98, wherein at least one said dispensing mechanism includes a dispensing member configured to move in a dispensing direction and to release said selected product.

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103. (Amended) The vending machine of claim 100, wherein said at least one dispensing mechanism concludes dispensing of said selected product before dispensing a subsequent product associated therewith.

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